

*The Primitive Slavs*

17

solved as soon as peoples become fixed, in consequence of the necessity of integrating nonkindred elements into the social complex. The originally kindred groups become contaminated with extraneous elements, though still conceived as fictitious clans or tribes. When we first encounter the Slavs, they are mostly beyond the nomadic stage, and the most primitive social unit preserved among a Slavic people in historical times is the western Serbian *Zadruga*. This characteristic family community is probably, like the Indian "joint family," a remnant not merely of Slavic but of common Indo-European antiquity. 613 [361]

As far as we can judge from historical survivals, the basic social unit among the early Slavs was a rural community consisting of a certain number of persons of common descent, together with outsiders who acquired membership by marriage or adoption. Its head was either its senior member or an elected chief, and direction might even devolve upon a prominent widow. The chief represented the group in external relations and directed its economy, though in serious matters he was subject to the joint decision of its membership. Collectivity of goods prevailed; the whole fortune of such a unit, together with the individual earnings of its members, belonged to the group, and could not be disposed of without common consent. Membership in such groups might run as high as over a score of households. Fields, woodland, and similar landed appendages were common property, but pasturage might be particularized. Where trade and barter became matters of vital interest (as was the case very early on the Russian watercourses), primitive towns seem to have been the creation of ambitious groups who sought a convenient point for defense or trade and then proceeded to expand their possessions and influence by the acquisition (peacefully or by violence) of adjacent interesting territory. On the other hand, patriarchal relationships might persist even in these centers. Tribal complexes such as we later encounter among the Russian Slavs derived from the union of various family units with remote ties of kinship and might attain a membership of several thousand souls. The 621 613 421 361 [38] 621 619